

***Tatort: Murder Scene, Montage and Melancholy
in the Neo-Noir Imagination
(or: Das Leiden unter der Tat und die Sehnsucht nach dem Wissen)***¹

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10am. Forty-year old Kurt Wallander of the Ystad police has just got back from the dentist where he has had a painful broken tooth fixed. He assembles his team of police detectives and officers to consider the new case that dragged him from his bed just four hours earlier. The particulars are always new; the procedures to be followed are always the same. Henning Mankell writes:

The case review that morning, the first in the hunt for the single or multiple perpetrators who for unknown reasons were responsible for the murder of the photographer Simon Lamberg, was of short duration. There were countless routine methods for proceeding that they always followed. They had to wait for the report from the medical examiner's office in Lund, as well as the forensic investigation of the crime scene that Nyberg and his men were conducting. They would now make a study of Simon Lamberg and chart out the life that he had lived. They would also question neighbours and look for others who might have witnessed something. There was also hope that even in these early stages information would come in that would make it possible to clear up the murder in the course of a few days. But Wallander already had an instinctive feeling that they stood on the brink of a complicated case. They had very little – or rather, nothing – to go on. (2009: 223-224).

The 'Death of the Photographer', the fourth investigation undertaken by Wallander in the series of five short stories that serves as a prequel to Mankell's more familiar full-length novels, will certainly prove as complex and protracted a case as the detective fears but this is not what interests me here. Wallander will indeed soon have things "to go on"; he will eventually solve the case. Rather, my concern is with how these things "to go on" themselves come into being and accumulate, with the origin of what will in due course come to be termed 'evidence,' a perhaps curious term given that, at the start of the enquiry, what will in the future constitute 'evidence' is often anything but 'evident'. What is significant, what is

not? In a classic case of hermeneutic circularity, until such evidence starts to become a little more evident, the police have “nothing to go on”. Indeed, one might go a little further: the moment when what actually *is* ‘evidence’ and what *is not* finally becomes evident – when the pieces of the puzzle come together, so to speak – is that of the solving of the case itself. The police investigation, and the narrative of the detective story, typically constitute a threefold structure: firstly of course, there is the crime itself, the murder, the foul deed which sets everything in train; then, following its discovery, there is the collection of things that might come to be deemed as ‘evidence,’ a process of accumulation which involves precisely those “countless routine methods for proceeding that they always followed”; and finally there is the scrutiny of that gathered material, its interrogation and interpretation by the detective who ponders and puzzles over it, composes and recomposes it into the story of events leading up to and including the criminal deed itself.

If this is the case, then the figure of the police detective adopts a twofold guise: firstly, they are a kind of collector and, indeed, a meta-collector, a collector of collections; secondly, they are the ultimate interpreter of these various collections collected by other expert collectors. One may consider the figure of the detective accordingly as a peculiar kind of archivist: that is to say, as the creator, curator and connoisseur of an ever-increasing assemblage of information, images, texts and materials retrieved from the crime scene [*Tatort*] and elsewhere² and retained in the official police files and records. The detective (from the Latin: *detegere* ‘to uncover’) discovers the truth by means of documenting the dead and deciphering the deed. But perhaps I am rushing ahead. Let us retrace our steps a moment.

Mankell’s novels and their various TV adaptations and series, both Swedish- and British-made, have ensured that Kurt Wallander is among the best-known figures of Nordic neo-noir, a genre of fiction enjoying not only wide-spread popularity and acclaim in recent years, but also attracting the attention of academics and scholars. My own interest here is perhaps not altogether surprising given a longstanding preoccupation with the writings of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, Critical Theorists who were themselves fascinated by the detective story as an acute literary expression of the anxious and uncanny experiences of metropolitan modernity and as the very incarnation of modern instrumental rationality itself, the triumph of the *Ratio* in our own soulless, dispirited times. While Benjamin’s reflections, as we will see, often consist of typically tantalizing fragments and suggestive asides, penned principally under the auspices of his ever-expanding *Arcades Project* (Benjamin, 1999) and

related essays on the Parisian poet Charles Baudelaire (Benjamin, 2003), Kracauer's (1979) pioneering philosophical treatise from the early 1920s³ looks to provide a more substantial and sustained critical examination of the detective story as an exemplary "surface-level expression" (Kracauer, 1995: 75) of capitalist modernity as a world of disenchantment in both senses of this term: as de-mystification and as dismay. The detective is both the principal agent and the ultimate casualty of this disillusionment. In what follows, envisaged as a contribution to a wider ongoing exploration of Critical Theory and the contemporary neo-noir imagination,⁴ I consider here how particular motifs and figures drawn from Benjamin and Kracauer may serve to illuminate noir and neo-noir – if indeed such darkness allows for any such 'illumination' – with respect to three themes or thematic complexes: characteristic spaces and settings; distinctive narrative/chronological structures; and principal figures (above all, the ever-dutiful, ever-troubled detective). Spaces, times, protagonists – let us tease these out momentarily, and then weave them together again.

Spatiality: As Ed Dimendberg (2004) sets out, noir as a quintessentially urban form of crime fiction was shaped by and imbued with, the contrasting and distinctive dynamics of the mid-twentieth century American city – on the one hand, the centripetal forces of crowding, concentration and downtown intensification exemplified by the looming verticality of New York; and, on the other, the centrifugal forces of low-rise dispersal and horizontal proliferation resulting in the drive-thru suburban sprawl of Los Angeles. And, importantly, whether East coast Gotham or West coast freeway labyrinth, noir picks away at and unravels the schemes and machinations of the metropolitan rich and powerful, of those who have looked to distance themselves – spatially, physically, architecturally, socially – from the inescapable consequences of shameful past misdeeds, shady associations, and scandalous dealings on the 'other side', the 'wrong side of the tracks'. Driving back and forth between luxury penthouses in 'gated communities' and shabby motel rooms in seedy backstreets, the noir detective will come to recognise the manifold threads tying together these seemingly disparate locales.

In *Der Detektiv-Roman*, Kracauer's architectural acuity focuses on other, more specific sites and haunts of the pre-noir detective story, and one recurrent scene in particular: the hotel lobby.⁵ In an extended comparison with the sacred space of the church and the devotion of those who come to worship there, Kracauer regards the lobby as a profane 'in-between space' (*Zwischenraum*) or threshold of waiting – of waiting for its own sake that is, of waiting

without expectation. A *waiting*, not an *awaiting*. As such, the lobby is a realm of boredom and tedium exacerbated by the inescapable gossip and empty chatter of its various occupants, a locus as drained of meaning as all those left-behind teacups. Bereft of any higher significance, oriented to nothing beyond itself, this is merely a temporary refuge for the forlorn, faithless ones.⁶ The fictional “empty forms” (Kracauer 1995: 183) that people detective stories here correspond to the “spiritually shelterless” (Kracauer 1998: 88) salaried masses that so avidly read them.

And neo-noir also has its own characteristic panoply of banal and bleak locations. These are, significantly, no longer limited to anonymous metropolitan spaces: yes, to be sure, there are sites of post-industrial urban dereliction and neglect, of dismal warehouses and lock-ups, of empty multi-storey car parks, of grim housing estates on the margins; but also, intriguingly, there are sites of remoteness and isolation – drab rural backwaters, run-down farms and untended farmland, impoverished smallholdings, abandoned quarries. The ruinous city has here been joined by despoiled landscapes, the profound melancholy of anomic cities echoed by the mournfulness and muteness of trammelled Nature as sorrow-scape. The crime scene [*Tatort*] is all around us, everywhere to behold.⁷

Temporality: The concept of the ruin, of course, combines space and time, and in particular, exhibits the work of time as disintegration, dissolution, and decay, what Benjamin (1985) designates as *Naturgeschichte* or ‘natural history’. The preoccupation with such untimely spaces is but one aspect of noir, neo-noir and the detective story in relation to temporality. Such fictions are predicated upon a very particular and distinctive chronological structure. The story opens, typically, with the deed itself, the murder, the crime and / or its discovery. This is what sets everything and everyone in motion; everything flows from this. But it does not flow in one direction. The detective story is peculiarly Janus-faced. The principal narrative in the form of the investigation – all those “countless routine methods” undertaken by the police, pathologists and forensics experts, all that Nybergian labour to which the reader / viewer is partially privy – progresses, proceeds into the ‘future’, towards the eventual moment of ‘solution’. It does so, however, only through uncovering – in ever greater detail and complexity – those events, movements and moments from the past that are the antecedents of the deed. As the narrative / case advances, the detective-as-archaeologist and / or genealogist delves ever-more deeply into what that has led up to this killing: the whys and wherefores, the motives, the grudges, the violence and pain that has culminated in this death.

The detective story unfolds into the future and unfurls into the past at the same time. Indeed, one might agree with Benjamin when he cites a dictum from Karl Kraus, ““origin is the goal”” (Benjamin, 2003: 395).⁸

But in noir and neo-noir there is rarely just one single isolated murder. One deed inevitably leads to another – to finish the job, or to cover one’s tracks, to silence the witnesses. And with each of these deaths, the procedures begin anew. Hence, within each of these narratives, these cases, there is a certain repetition, a starting afresh not on a new investigation as such (though, of course, such deeds may ultimately prove to be unconnected) but a rejigging, a reconfiguring, a supplementing of the initial and ongoing one. Bodies accumulate; cases complicate or proliferate or both. The serial killer is mirrored by the serial detective. But, importantly, for the detective, unlike the perpetrator, this seriality does not stop with the eventual arrest, trial, conviction and subsequent closing of the case. Justice is done. But as one case closes, the next one opens. For the noir detective, there is no escape, no finale. Noir detectives are rarely one-offs, stand-alone affairs. There is the much-awaited sequel; there is Season Two, Three And so our Sisyphean sleuth must start ever anew investigating the nothing-new, the always-the-same of the case by means of those “countless routine methods for proceeding that they always followed” (Mankell, 2009: 223). And this endless cycle of death and violence, this routinization of traumatic events, all these calamitous deeds constituting one ceaseless catastrophe, will inevitably take their toll on the detective and leave them appalled, aghast, yet more broken. We will return to this.

Figures: It is little wonder, then, that one of the hallmarks of noir and neo-noir is how the figure of the detective, whether gumshoe PI or police officer, is portrayed as damaged or dysfunctional. At the very least, they are a serial worrier. Back in Ystad, Mankell writes of Wallander: “He noticed as he sat in the conference room that he was anxious. The ache in his tooth was now gone. But instead he had this new worry in his stomach” (2009: 224). But perhaps this “new worry” will dissipate as the case proceeds, the evidence accumulates, suspicions mount, and the guilty party is eventually identified and apprehended. True, the next case will bring renewed anxieties, fresh worries – indeed, Mankell proposes the subtitle ‘Novels about the Swedish Anxiety’ for the whole Wallander series. And it is true, too, that this sense of futile repetition is certainly a factor in the melancholy constitution of the detective figure. The shabby and sordid worlds discovered behind the outwardly respectable facades of the everyday are hardly likely to promote a cheerful disposition. But these are also

not what is *decisive* in the making of the distinctly ‘defective detective’. No matter how many cases Kurt Wallander investigates and solves – and the same is true of his colleagues in Iceland (Erlendur, Andri Ólafsson), Denmark (Sarah Lund, Martin Rohde, Henrik Sabroe) or Norway (Harry Hole), and indeed his compatriots like Saga Norén from his old patch down the road in Malmo – there always remains something else which afflicts him / her and which will continue to do so long after the particular case at hand is closed. There is some other condition or circumstance in the background which goes un-investigated and stays unsolved, unresolved, the ‘not-yet’ as Ernst Bloch would term it, that cannot be got at, which cannot be laid to rest, which cannot be cured, with which the detective cannot be reconciled or even resigned, at least not yet. And it is precisely this other enduring and insoluble mystery / conundrum which haunts the detective and makes noir *noir*: the various police cases themselves are only ever excuses, alibis, for the summoning of these other inescapable and unending cares and sorrows.

Broken tooth, bad stomach – these are, frankly, the least of Wallander’s troubles. If only there was a dentist for fixing fractured and fractious relationships (with his irascible father, his headstrong daughter, his ex-wife) and a ready-made remedy for curdled marriages and the sour taste of guilt and remorse. If only Erlendur could discover and recover the body of his brother, lost in a snowstorm when they were both young children; if only Hole could stay off the bottle and allow himself to love; if only Saga could come to terms with her sister’s suicide and her mother’s mental instability; if only Henrik could find his wife and children who disappeared many years earlier and who haunt him to this this day. *If only*. The noir detective is a catalogue of failures and failings: anxieties and addictions, lost love-ones and personal traumas, blighted relationships and broken promises. They are collectors, indeed a collection of, catastrophes, a living archive of anguish and agonies.⁹

This brings us back to the figure of the detective as collector. It is perhaps surprising that Benjamin does not make this identification, or does so only obliquely, indirectly, looking instead to the figure of the flaneur as the prototype of the detective. In *Convolute M* of the *Arcades Project* he writes:

Preformed in the figure of the flaneur is that of the detective. The flaneur required a social legitimation of his habitus. It suited him very well to see his indolence as a plausible front, behind which, in reality, hides the riveted attention of an

observer who will not let the unsuspecting malefactor out of his sight. (1999a: 442, M13a,2)

Like the flaneur, then, the detective is configured as the acute observer of the city and the astute physiognomist of its inhabitants, as one who sees through the everyday to disclose what lies below the surface. The flaneur-detective as critical urban reader and interpreter fundamentally mistrusts the appearances of things, and shows us that the banal, mundane world is not quite what it seems, that there is another layer of reality to be revealed and unfolded.¹⁰ Moreover, as a figure of digression and seduction, the detective is continually circling the city in the hunt for clues and for the killer. This also involves mistakes and misidentifications, misinterpretations – detective stories are full of deliberate misdirection on the part of the writer – though these ‘red herrings,’ false leads and blind-alleys are as much a part of detection and flanerie as purposive progress.

The flaneur-detective as reader and as pursuer combine in Benjamin’s reading of Edgar Allen Poe’s eerie tale from 1840 ‘The Man of the Crowd’. While one of the defining literary incarnations of the flaneur, exact identifications here are subject to dispute: is the daemonic ‘man of the crowd’ himself a vision of the flaneur? – prowling the nocturnal streets of early Victorian London in perpetual search of asylum amid the last vestiges of the daytime urban crowd; or, more likely, is it his pursuant, the narrator, who follows him from a safe distance, lured ever-onwards by a compelling fascination which remains ultimately unsatisfied as dawn breaks and the spell is finally broken? The flaneur as hunter or as hunted, as criminal-detective or innocent victim and stalker? – however this ambiguity and/or duality is configured, this curious story provides Benjamin with what he famously terms “something like an X-ray of a detective story” (2003: 27), an outline in which its skeletal structure is clearly evident even as the actual crime itself is missing.

Indeed, the city at night, a sinister figure with an inscrutable countenance and an eccentric manner, a futile chase that leads through the darkened streets from the most fashionable parts of town to its most wretched slums, providing thereby a kind of street-level panorama of spatial economies and inequalities, an uneasy ending without moral resolution or the comfort of certitude – these tropes are the bare bones of a very particular kind of detective fiction, not the genteel Miss Marple world of tea at the vicarage, country house murders and the butler who dunnit, confessing dutifully when unmasked by the amateur sleuth on the final page, but

the hard-boiled variety that was to flourish in the sleazy ‘means streets’ of New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles, as penned by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald. Poe’s ‘Man of the Crowd’ is an x-ray not so much of the detective story *per se*, but of the crime thriller as *noir*.

While for Benjamin the flaneur is a figure of vision in the city, the collector is one of tactility: “Possession and having are allied with the tactile,” he writes, “and stand in a certain opposition to the optical” (1999a: 206, H2,5). Something is not just seen, but grasped; not just observed, but appropriated. Hence, the key to understanding the practice and significance of the collector is the two-fold practice of de- and re-contextualization: firstly removing an object from its where it is found, its initial location and habitual environment; and, then placing it into a new situation along with other items which share some attribute or other, inserting it into different order or system of objects thereby accentuating hitherto underplayed qualities or transforming conventional meaning. For example, a seemingly humble, functional artefact – a teacup, for example – is appropriated by the collector and is reconfigured thereby into an object of aesthetic appreciation and contemplation – *chinoiserie*. Collecting disconnects from an existing ensemble or assemblage and re-connects to form a novel one. Benjamin observes:

What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. This relation is the diametric opposite of any utility, and falls into the peculiar category of completeness. What is this ‘completeness’? It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object’s mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system: the collection. And for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopaedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the owner from which it comes. (1999a: 204-5, H1a,2)

For me, the figures of the flaneur and the collector come together in that of the detective. Our indefatigable investigator is both the intense observer of the cityscape/landscape and its sites (as crime scene) and the one who recognises and seizes upon its material fragments (as clues and evidence). Forensics is both optical and tactile: it attends, above all, to the minutiae and fragments, the scraps and remainders that still linger at the crime scene. It mulls over the

leavings, the debris, of the deed. This requires a keen eye for the telling detail, the seemingly inconsequential but significant clue, that which might easily be overlooked or dismissed as worthless trash: a cigarette end, a lost button, a few fibres, a drop of blood, a fleck of paint, a few human hairs here, a dirty footprint there. The detective as forensic practitioner therefore becomes a particular type of flaneur/collector in the city, one who knows the true value of disregarded detritus: the ragpicker, the *chiffonier*, Baudelaire's most provocative figure of the poet as destitute wordsmith.¹¹

What kinds of collecting are practiced by the ragpicking detective? If we rejoin Wallander's meeting for a moment, we see that forensic collections of various kinds are instigated and undertaken under the rubric of those "countless routine methods of proceeding":

1. *corporeal*: the dead body itself must be examined by the pathologist *in situ* and then and subject to a full autopsy to establish time and cause of death (for Wallander's team, work to be performed by the medics in Lund).
2. *topographical*: the spatial layout and context of the crime scene (*Tatort*: literally 'deed place') itself must be photographed and mapped; the site itself is to be 'read' as what Kracauer terms a "spatial hieroglyph" (1987: 52).
3. *archaeological*: the *Tatort* becomes the site of excavation and cataloguing of material traces and clues; the facts (*Tatsache*) must be ascertained (these two tasks, the topographical and the archaeological are for Nyberg and his team)
4. *testimonial*: the collection and collation of witness statements, accounts by neighbours and friends, knocking on doors to establish who saw what, when, where and with whom;
5. *biographical / genealogical*: the piecing together of the life and death story of the victim; searching their home, looking through all manner of records (medical, financial, legal/criminal, employment histories, photo albums) establishing relationships and personal histories, family records. How is/was the victim embedded in networks of social relations?¹²

The detective as forensic *chiffonier* does not gather up these fragments to recycle and sell them (like the humble ragpicker); or redeem them as linguistic scraps from which to fashion the true poetry of the metropolitan streets (like Baudelaire himself); but rather extracts them from the *Tatort* for later analysis, scrutiny and interpretation: the detective-flaneur as

chiffonier becomes the *dechiffreur*. This takes place back at the police station, in the incident room. It is here that all this material – medical, spatial, visual, physical, textual, biographical – is finally brought for the purposes of reconstruction. Photographs, maps, drawings, witness statements and reports are pinned up on the crime investigation board to compose a kind of evidentiary assemblage, a montage of the murder, a still-life of the now-dead. And as more information comes in, as more material is gathered, returned from the labs or sent over by the ballistics experts, this crime board will become ever fuller, ever denser with new accretions and additions. As the case develops – as fresh cases are added in the event of a serial killer at work – the board expands, increases, encompassing more and more images, texts, notes and mappings. Lines are drawn to show connections; pins are inserted into maps showing locations. The crime scene then is the space of the de-contextualization of the material collected; the crime board is the site / the plane on which these findings are recomposed and re-contextualized, put on display, opened up to gaze of the investigating team.

I wish to make two main points in relation to this crime board: as a locus of construction and as an object of contemplation.

Firstly, we can understand the unfolding of the narrative of the detective drama as the gradual accumulation of pieces of evidence that come to find their way eventually onto the crime board: spaces and settings, times and chronologies, victims and suspects – all these join the montage. As the investigation proceeds, more and more is pinned up, stuck or, scribbled upon the board. In this sense, the crime board *is* the on-going archive of the case. Only later, when it is solved or abandoned as insoluble, will all this material be packed away and stored as a file among all the other criminal records down in the basement. Case closed. Let us return here to the temporality and chronology of the detective story to which the crime / evidence board stands as silent bearer and witness: as the narrative itself moves forwards in time, expanding in scope, bringing to light new details and clues, so too does it reach further back in time as the police officers search for the precursors of the crime, its causes rooted at some moment somewhere in the past. As I have suggested, the detective story progresses simultaneously in two directions: as we move into future (the narrative of the story) we descend further into the past world (of the victim). And it is, of course, the deed itself, the murder, which stands at the dividing point in time, on the threshold, so to speak: in one direction, the investigation *unfolds*; in the other, the past is *unfolded* in the present. And so, just the search in the present widens, so the past to be searched also expands. The deed then is

not a mere point on a simple narrative line, but rather it is the centre point or node from which both the future and the past fan out. Like a pair of wings. X marks the spot.

Why is this significant? I suggest that the *crime board* as a montage of miscellany comes to resemble the *storyboard* of the scriptwriter or author of the fiction who has carefully plotted all the connections and clues, the causes and motives, the false leads and red herrings, the characters and their roles (victims, suspects, witnesses, perpetrators) *in advance*. Indeed, the writer has perhaps used this very visual technique to compose the whole narrative in the first place: the narrative itself then involves the detectives in recovering the pieces and re-composing this collage of details. The detectives work *backwards* to *reconstruct* what the author has already *constructed*. In short, the detective tells the story, but does so backwards, starting with its end, that is to say, the deed. The detective begins with the murder, with death, with a catastrophe that has just occurred. Pinned up on the board is the photograph of the victim, when they were alive, now they are dead. The living person smiles from one picture; next to it, s/he is pictured as corpse. Contemplating these juxtaposed images, the detective thinks: they are going to die, they are already dead. This is their fate, this is in *their future* but it is now in the past: a future catastrophe that has already happened. This echoes Roland Barthes's (1993) vision of photography in his haunting reflections upon the famous and unseen 'winter-garden portrait' of his recently deceased mother as a young girl. Contemplating such images of the 'then-living' but 'now-dead' turns the Spectator, Barthes observes, into something akin to a 'backwards looking prophet'.¹³

Benjamin recognizes this connection between the collector and the fate of things, their destiny:

It must be kept in mind that, for the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects. Ordered, however, according to a surprising and for the profane understanding, incomprehensible connection. This connection stands to the customary ordering and schematization of things something as their arrangement in the dictionary stands to a natural arrangement. We need only recall what importance a particular collector attaches not only to his object but also to its entire past, whether this concerns the origin and objective characteristics of the thing or the details of its ostensibly external history All of these – the 'objective' data together with the other – come together for the true collector in every single one of his possessions to form a whole magic

encyclopaedia, a world order, whose outline is the *fate* of his object. Here, therefore, within this circumscribed field, we can understand how great physiognomists (and collectors are physiognomists of the world of things) become interpreters of fate. (1999a: 207, H2,7; H2a,1)

Secondly, there is the issue of the reading or – more precisely – the *struggle to read* the crime / evidence board, to understand the logic that connects the various pieces of information displayed upon it. The board tells the story of the crime: everything is there; the answer is in plain view; but how can one make sense of it all, how can one decipher it? The crime board is not simply a montage of eclectic elements, then, it is also a picture puzzle or rebus, or rather a series of such puzzles, a gathering of hieroglyphs which the detective must laboriously study and render meaningful. The illegibility of the crime board, the incomprehensibility of its pieces, the indeterminacy of its elements, and the elusiveness of its sense combine to frustrate the detective and reduce them to a state of melancholy. The neo-noir detective does not solve the puzzle through acts of genius and the exquisite calculations of the *Ratio*, like Sherlock Holmes, but instead sits brooding in contemplation of the horrors that have occurred in some god-forsaken spot elsewhere in the city, in the hinterland, at the back of beyond; sufferings whose traces and vestiges have now accumulated upon the crime board; cruelties which continue to defy their understanding.¹⁴

The neo-noir detective is reduced to desperate, seemingly impotent contemplation, like some Albrecht Dürer etching of the figure of Melancholy.¹⁵ Before the board, the neo-noir detective is indeed a figure lost in the contemplation of the sorrowfulness of the world, its meanness, its pettiness, its shadows and nightmares, its violence and brutality. They are a troubled figure of mournfulness and brooding. The detective is a *Grübler*. No wonder that Benjamin saw an affinity between the collector and the Baroque allegorist as figures confronted by a broken world:

Perhaps the most deeply hidden motive of the person who collects can be described this way: he takes up the struggle against dispersion. Right from the start, the great collector is struck by the confusion, by the scatter, in which the things of the world are found. It is the same spectacle that so preoccupied the men of the Baroque; in particular, the world image of the allegorist cannot be explained apart from the passionate, distraught concern with this spectacle. The

allegorist is, as it were, the polar opposite of the collector. He has given up the attempt to elucidate things through research into their properties and relations. He dislodges things from their context and, from the outset, relies on his profundity to illuminate their meaning. The collector, by contrast, brings together what belongs together; by keeping in mind their affinities and their succession in time, he can eventually furnish information about his objects. Nevertheless – and this is more important than all the differences that may exist between them – in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector. (1999a: 211, H4a,1).

The neo- noir detective is precisely this hybrid of collector and allegorist: they are a collector in finally making sense of the jumble of pieces that have come to constitute the montage of murder before them, thereby bringing the case to a successful conclusion. But at the same time, as I have already suggested, the resolution of the investigation is not what is central to (neo-)noir. The *real* puzzle is the detective themselves. The brooding over this painful enigma continues. It is a life-long problem. In fact, the one assuredly exacerbates the other: why is it that the detective is able to solve this complex case, but not their own complexes? Why is it that what is most important is also at the same time the most elusive? Every successful *case* makes the on-going *condition* more intolerable. It is enough to drive anyone to drink. Not that Jo Nesbø's Harry Hole, for example, needs much driving.

Let us now imagine the dogged, dumbfounded detective standing before the crime board, lost in contemplation of its myriad pieces and possibilities, star-gazing at all the potential constellations of meaning that are pinned and pin-pointed there: as they bear witness, their colleagues regularly come and go, not talking of Michelangelo, but adding to the mounting collection of image and documents of the case, sticking them up before their mournful eyes. Down at the city morgue, the bodies mount up, too. As the investigation goes on so other victims are discovered, while yet more perish at the hands of the serial killer still at large. This cannot go on! More and more crimes and deaths, more and more evidence; the board rapidly disappears beneath all the photographs and papers that have been attached to it. Under the weight of all this documentation, it finally falls from the wall with a clatter. But that is not the end of it. No, the materials continue to accumulate. More deaths, more details. Like Barthes's backwards looking prophet, the detective contemplates this profusion with ever greater horror, stares wide-eyed into the catastrophic past which is irrevocably past and still

in the making. They would cry out for an end to it all. Stop! The mouth opens, but no cry is forthcoming. There is no halt to proceedings for the story continues, progresses, they cannot but move into the future while helplessly contemplating these accumulating catastrophes now piling up on at their feet on the incident room floor.

If it is not already obvious, then let me say it: for me, the neo-noir detective is an incarnation of Benjamin's (2003) famous 'Angel of History,'¹⁶ his enigmatic reading of Paul Klee's equally enigmatic painting *Angelus Novus*, who, turned towards the ceaselessly accumulating catastrophes of the past as witness, is irresistibly and inevitably blown backwards into the future. The Angel sees it all: everything in all its misery and depravity. The Angel: the unwilling unwitting collector or rather collection point of the debris; the accidental involuntary archivist of human affliction. This is the wretched world that the detective 'discovers'; and its storm-cloud darkness is what makes it noir.

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¹ This article combines and revises papers originally presented at the National University of Ireland, Galway and the University of York.

² This ‘elsewhere’ [*anderswo*] includes, for example, all those sites frequented by victim(s) and suspects, all their haunts and habitations which are to be visited and revisited as the investigation proceeds. Driving here and there, criss-crossing cityscapes and barren landscapes, the detective maps the myriad movements and encounters of these individuals as ‘biotopographies’.

³ Kracauer’s (1979) *Der Detektiv-Roman: Ein Philosophischer Traktat* was written between 1922 and 1925 but remained unpublished in his lifetime. The section ‘Hotelhalle’ [‘Hotel Lobby’] was first published in his 1963 collection *Das Ornament der Masse* (see *The Mass Ornament*, 1995).

⁴ This wider project also looks beyond the works of Benjamin and Kracauer to explore reflections penned by their colleague Ernst Bloch (1988), by their contemporary Antonio Gramsci (2012), and the writings of more recent commentators and critical cultural theorists such as Luc Boltanski (2014) and Frederic Jameson (2016). Moreover, this is not limited (as here) to examples from Scandinavian neo-noir. Rather, it encompasses and looks to explore other neo-noir genres and settings. For example: so-called Celtic neo-noir (the three series of the Anglo-Welsh television drama *Hinterland* [*Y Gwyll*, 2013-2016]; and, the ‘Mediterranean noir’ of Jean-Claude Izzo’s Marseille-set Fabio Montale trilogy (*Total Chaos* [1995/2005]; *Chourmo* [1996/2006]; and, *Soléa* [1998/2007])).

⁵ See Kracauer (1995: 173-185).

⁶ Kracauer writes of the inhabitants of the hotel lobby: “Remnants of individuals slip into the nirvana of relaxation, faces disappear behind newspapers, and the artificial continuous light illuminates nothing but mannequins. It is the coming and going of unfamiliar people who have become empty forms because they have lost their password, and who now file by as ungraspable flat ghosts” (1995: 183).

⁷ Such a conception of Nature as silent and sorrowful is central to Benjamin’s study of the seventeenth-century German drama of mourning, the *Trauerspiel*. In these plays, Benjamin notes: “the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death’s head” (1985: 166). The *Tatort* is set in a *Trauerlandschaft*.

⁸ In the *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin uses this term ‘origin’ [*Ursprung*] in a rather particular and elusive way. It refers to a complex process of emergence and eruption rather a mere sequence or starting point. He writes: “Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming” (1985: 45).

⁹ Love, happiness, reconciliation, conviviality – the elusiveness of these is symptomatic of the fundamental modern existential crisis endured by and embodied in the noir and neo-noir detective. It is twofold: that of human life bereft of higher meaning; and, that of the absence of any consolation for such meaninglessness. We are mere creatures subject to

Naturgeschichte: the passions, physical decay and death. Central to Benjamin's understanding of the *Trauerspiel* is precisely its expression of the insignificance of human creaturely life in the God-forsaken world of seventeenth-century Europe. The correspondence here with the fate of those in Kracauer's hotel lobby is no coincidence. As the extended comparison with the church and its congregation makes clear, the world of modernity is God-forsaken in two senses: God has abandoned it; and human beings have abandoned God. For Kracauer, it is to this profound condition that the detective story ultimately gives expression.

¹⁰ As Boltanski (2014) has argued, this scepticism regarding the appearance of the world (and the world of appearances) is the key to detective and espionage fiction – it is, of course, also the motivating spirit of Surrealism. In unveiling the 'unconscious' coincidences and correspondences of everyday life, the *really real*, the detective is, like Louis Aragon, André Breton, Philippe Soupault, Paul Éluard and their ilk, a figure of 'profane illumination' (Benjamin, 1999b: 209). In his insistence upon the sobriety of such illumination, Benjamin writes: "The reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the *flâneur*, are types of illuminati just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic. And more profane. Not to mention that most terrible drug – ourselves – which we take in solitude" (1999b: 216). Benjamin's four illuminati here are all guises and disguises of the detective. And solitude, and its pain, is most certainly their principal milieu.

¹¹ The affinities of the detective and the abject figure of the ragpicker become clear when Benjamin cites Baudelaire thus: "Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day's refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste. He sorts things out and selects judiciously; he collects, like a miser, guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry" (2003: 48). As "the most provocative figure of human misery", the ragpicker serves Baudelaire as a model of poetic practice: see Benjamin (2003: 48) and Benjamin (1999a: 349-350, J68,4).

¹² This is precisely what is meant by: "They would now make a study of Simon Lamberg and chart out the life that he had lived" (Mankell, 2009: 223).

¹³ See Barthes (1993: 87 and 96).

¹⁴ Hence the subtitle of my paper: a reversal of Kracauer's (1917) vision of the modern spiritless world of the *Ratio* as one in which one suffers under knowledge and longs for the deed; here, the detective suffers under the deed and longs for knowledge. See 'Das Leiden unter dem Wissen und die Sehnsucht nach der Tat,' first published in Kracauer (2004).

¹⁵ See Benjamin's (1985: 149-151) famous discussion of this figure in his study of the *Trauerspiel*.

¹⁶ See Thesis IX of his 1940 'On the Concept of History' (in Benjamin, 2003: 392).